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Book Review

Placed-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity by D.A. Gruenewald and G.A. Smith (Eds.)

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Placed-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity

D.A. Gruenewald and G.A. Smith Eds.

Abingdon: Routledge (2007) pp. 408 Pbk. £26.99

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The timely publication of this book marks a re-birth in interest in place-based education. It sets out with the specific goal of articulating a niche role for education in addressing both environmental and social concerns through engagement with 'place'. The structure of the book is henceforth designed to balance both pragmatic and theoretical insights into how such engagement could offer a progressive, educational alternative to current systems and approaches.

Editors, David Gruenewald and Gregory Smith, begin by contextualising 'Place-based Education' within the broader social movement of "new localism", which has developed in response to growing concerns for the local within the current climate of economic globalisation. The book then proceeds in three parts, each of which offers complementary insights into place-based education.

Part one is comprised of a range of contributions from educators across America, who share their unique, lived experiences of place-based pedagogies. This format provides a helpful introduction, allowing the reader insights into the rich, multi-faceted nature of an educational approach which aims to engage with the complexities of society, culture and the environment. Each diverse chapter, recalling detailed experiences of place-based learning from across America, inspires interest and understanding of what place-based education is, or can be. Chapter 5, for example, guides the reader through the experience of Elaine Senechal; a science teacher at a Community High School in Massachusetts, empowering pupils through engagement with urban ecology. While in Chapter 2 Mark Graham shares his experiences of using art as a social practice to engage students, and the broader community, with community life. Despite engagement with a range of different contexts, challenges and concerns, each chapter contributes to a shared sense of inter-connectivity through the ethical relationships fostered by engaging with place.

For me, the second part of the book provides a theoretical narrative to compliment the applied insights gained from part one. It explores the potential breadth and responsibility of education through place-based approaches. Throughout Chapter 7, David Gruenewald argues that the language of diversity, within schooling has been diluted through practices aimed to 'standardise' and 'close achievement gaps' and therefore proposes a 'critical pedagogy of place', harmonising the politics of place and culture to enrich and expand learning. Other contributors, detail more specific forms of student engagement. Part two ends with an insightful history (Chapter 10) of the tensions which are located between notions of community and diversity. Through these tensions Paul Theobald and John Siskar discuss the role of place 'as a catalyst for deep learning' which supports democratic participation and critical thinking.

The final part of the book takes place-based learning into the realms of Higher Education, including contributions from prolific writers in the field, such as David Sobel. This section invites stories from more diverse 'places' still; from Israel to Australia, exposing the reader to equally rich and challenging applications of place-based learning in order to provide an evolved picture of place-based education.

Overall this book is very powerful in conveying place-based education as a comprehensive and potentially transformative approach. This is primarily achieved through the grounded and lived words of the pioneering contributors. The attention to locality of the places discussed in this book serves to increase its relevance across contexts. *'it may be only through a close examination of the local that the impact of global relationships can be properly understood.'*

This volume engages with the inter-connected nature of life in a way which is both accessible and academically satisfying, its relevance therefore spans across a number of fields and areas of interest; from critical theory to eco-justice education, multicultural to environmental education.